



# CAPTivations

## Success Stories in Prevention

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### Tarrant Awareness Project (TX)

Kids in Tarrant County, Texas, help spread the word that underage drinking is not cool by coming up with billboard slogans and public service announcement commercials which are seen not only throughout the Fort Worth area, but in other parts of west Texas.

"When you drive down the street and see a billboard you helped create, that's pretty impressive," said Larry Ellis, Tarrant Awareness Project director.

Tarrant Awareness Project coalition, funded by a grant from the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA), is part of Tarrant County Challenge, Inc.

Started in 1984 as Fort Worth Challenge, TCC confronts substance abuse in Tarrant County by assessing needs, educating the community, mobilizing resources, promoting collaboration and advocating for positive public policy. Tarrant Awareness Project, which began four years ago, focuses its entire efforts on combating underage drinking.

Tarrant County, part of the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, includes Fort Worth, Arlington, and other urban and suburban communities. It is home to 37 school districts, as well as University of Texas-Arlington and Texas Christian University. Among the major employers are Lockheed Martin, TXU Energy, Radio Shack, and American Airlines. It also has an extensive health care network.

Its population of 1.3 million includes 350,000 individuals who are under 21 years of age. About 68 percent are of European descent, 11 percent are African-American, 14 percent are Hispanic, and the remaining 5 percent are Asian, American Indian or of some other origin.

The Tarrant Awareness Project (TAP) coalition includes high school students, ministers, representatives from both for-profit businesses and not-for-profit agencies, the president of the Metroplex Chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and Lieutenant Karen Smith from the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission enforcement division. Ellis is working to get local law enforcement more involved in the coalition meetings.

One of the major on-going TAP projects is the annual slogan campaign. At the start of the school year, Ellis goes to Tarrant County's 37

school districts, as well as to social service agencies as the YMCA and the Girls and Boys Clubs and encourages kids of all ages to participate in the slogan contest. All slogans must be ten words or less and encourage kids not to drink.

Last year, two sixth graders won the contest. The first slogan read: "Get Into Alcohol And Get Into Heavy Metal," and showed a young man behind bars in prison. The other slogan read: "Be The Life Of The Party: Stay Alcohol-Free." Both slogans were released over the winter on billboards and bus-boards all over Tarrant County for at least four weeks.

"Clear Channel (billboard company) works with us," Ellis notes. "Sometimes the billboards will run longer if no one purchases billboard space."

Kids from many backgrounds were involved in making a public service spot last April with the help of Circle R Broadcasting, a Radio Shack

company. Participating youth who came from Martin's Branch Boys' and Girls' Club, Fort Worth Country Day School, Santa Fe Adolescent Services, Boswell High School, University of Texas-Arlington, and Texas Christian University.

The PSA used the message gleaned from a Texas A&M University survey of Tarrant County students in grades nine through 12, which showed that 50 percent did not drink in the 30 days prior to the survey. In the PSA, the youth were dancing and having a good time, when two showed up and acted as though they were drunk. The others at the party did not want to have anything to do with the two who were "drunk." The party scenes were interspersed with messages from the Texas A&M survey and stating that it was cool not to drink for those under 21.

"The kids really mixed together well," Ellis observes. "The guy who made the commercial turned on the music and told them to mingle, and it was like they had known each other forever. He even let the kids do some of the filming."

Not only did the local TV stations in the Dallas-Fort Worth area pick up the spot and air it, but stations in Stephenville and Abilene also aired the spot.

"The kids are calling and asking when we're doing the next commercial," Ellis said.

Not all of Tarrant Awareness Project's

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activities directly involve the community's youth. In August 2002, the coalition held its first town hall meeting in Fort Worth's near-southeast neighborhood to address problems with convenience stores selling alcohol to minors. One store in particular had gained such a widespread reputation for "looking the other way" at selling alcohol to minors that kids from other parts of town were coming in to buy alcohol, and one person said the situation was so bad, he figured his ten-year-old could probably go in and buy liquor.

Speaking at the meeting were local law enforcement, students from the near-southeast side and the north side of Fort Worth, Lt. Smith from the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, community activists, State Rep. Glenn Lewis, and Fort Worth Councilman Ralph McCloud. Speakers discussed alcohol and drug trafficking in the neighborhood, as well as prostitution and the general crime rate in the area. A deejay from the local Christian music station moderated the panel.

"We didn't know what to expect," Ellis said. "But we had 65 community members there." And, he added, the local ABC affiliate conducted some interviews around the town hall meeting and aired a report live that evening from the meeting.

Since the meeting, the store with the reputation of selling to anyone under 21, lost its liquor license. Ellis said the store had been under investigation before the meeting, but he believes information from the town hall meeting helped move the investigation along and aided in the store losing its license.

"Depending on how our grant funds go, we'd like to do one every year in different parts of town," Ellis points out.

Tarrant Awareness Project also has been the beneficiary of projects by Levi Strauss, a company that gives its employees five hours a month to perform community services and participates in two major community service projects a year. In 2001, representatives from Levi Strauss called TAP and said if its staff could come up with a project, Levi Strauss would fund it.

"We drove around looking for ideas, and decided to do a prevention mural," Ellis said. "We found a convenience store on the north side (of Fort Worth) that was the target of a lot of graffiti, and we asked the owners if we could do a mural on it. They stated, 'Sure.'"

TAP staff members and volunteers joined Levi employees on a warm fall day to paint a 10 foot by 20 foot mural on the side of the convenience store. They painted a beach scene with a banner over it reading, "My Life, My Choice: Drug Free."

The idea went over so well, TAP staff and volunteers and Levi employees met up again in October 2002 to paint another mural, this time at Wesley United Community Center, across from an elementary school on the north side of Fort Worth. They painted a similar beach scene with a light house and the slogan, "My life, my choice: Drug free" slogan on the light beam.

TAP and Levi Strauss were recognized as February 2002 Stars on the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

website for their efforts on the first mural. They were also asked to submit pictures of their work for the National Drug Enforcement Administration museum.

Another TAP project, in conjunction with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission is a vendor letter. This letter goes out each year to stores, bars, and other places which sell alcohol to inform the owners and employees of any changes in the state liquor laws. For example, in 2001, the penalty for providing alcohol to a minor changed from six months in jail or a \$2,000 fine to a \$4,000 fine, a year in jail, or both.

In addition, Ellis notes that, Texas driver's licenses changed so that the ones for those under 21 are in a vertical format, while the ones for those 21 and over remained in a horizontal format.

The coalition mailed out a sticker with the new penalties for providing alcohol for persons under 21. Each convenience store, bar, and restaurant which served alcohol, received a sticker. The stickers proved so popular, the coalition got many calls from proprietors requesting additional stickers.

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**Resources:**

Center for Substance Abuse  
Prevention  
[www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/  
csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

Decision Support System  
[www.preventiondss.org](http://www.preventiondss.org)

Join Together  
[www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions  
of America  
[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

For this community success story  
and others from across the  
Southwest region, visit our  
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www.swcapt.org/products/  
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